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SUBJECT: NO ROOM FOR DOUBT: ALL CANADIAN TROOPS OUT OF AFGHANISTAN BY DECEMBER 2011

REF: OTTAWA 906; 08 OTTAWA 373

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In testimony to Parliament on December 8, Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) General Walter Natynczyk confirmed that, in accordance with a March 2008 parliamentary motion, no Canadian Forces - apart from a military attache in Kabul - or military equipment will remain in Afghanistan after December 31, 2011. He indicated that there was no ambiguity in the Canadian Forces' or Government of Canada's position on the end of a military mission in Afghanistan after that date. Defence Minister Peter MacKay separately informed the House of Commons of this determination on December 7. Media attention has been surprisingly scant, focused more heavily on allegations of torture of Afghan detainees transferred by Canadian Forces to Afghan authorities (ref a). End summary.

¶2. (U) CDS General Walter Natynczyk, Major General Mark McQuillan (Commander of the Canadian Operational Support Command), and Lt. General J.G.M. Lessard (Commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command) briefed the House of Commons' National Defence Committee on December 8 regarding preparations for the withdrawal of Canadian Forces (CF) from Afghanistan in 2011, as mandated by a bipartisan parliamentary motion that the House of Commons passed in March 2008 (ref b). The generals testified at the invitation of the Committee.

JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS

¶3. (U) General Natynczyk noted that the Government of Canada had provided "clear instructions" in the 2008 parliamentary motion. He stated categorically that the CF combat mission in Kandahar would end on July 31, 2011 and that CF would cease all operations and leave Afghanistan by the end of December 2011. He added that "the Government of Canada clearly told me that this was the end of the military mission in uniform." He confirmed that the cessation of operations would include all military members of the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kandahar as well as military trainers. General Natynczyk indicated that Canadian PRTs would remain after 2011, but would be exclusively civilian teams, including representation from Foreign Affairs (DFAIT), Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Correctional Services Canada, and other agencies.

¶4. (U) When pressed, Natynczyk acknowledged the possibility that one CF member might remain in Afghanistan after December 2011 -- as a military attach???? at Canada's Embassy in Kabul -- but, otherwise, underscored that "we will be true to that [parliamentary] motion... this is the mandate we have received... this is how we interpret the mission." He insisted that "this is the end of the military mission."

PLANNING FOR A SEAMLESS TRANSITION

¶15. (U) General Natynczyk explained that Canada's objective will be to achieve a "seamless transition" to NATO allies and partners in Kandahar in 2011. He stated that the wrap up of the mission -- Canada's largest military deployment since the Korean War -- represented "significant" and "daunting" logistical challenges to tackle in an organized and sequenced manner. He highlighted that Canada has more than 1,200 military vehicles in Afghanistan, as well as "several thousands" of sea containers of "stuff" that the CF will need to repatriate. Although he confirmed that planning for withdrawal had already begun, he insisted that the CF will remain focused on the combat mission in the next 18 months, and fully intends to fulfill NATO and ISAF obligations over the next two years.

¶16. (U) Under questioning, General Natynczyk acknowledged that present guidance provided by the Government of Canada on Afghanistan could change, underscoring that the CF "live on fact and we live on orders." However, he insisted that "I can't wait

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for changes." He confirmed that he had issued an initial planning order in August, that Lt. General Lessard had followed up with an initial planning guideline in September, and that next steps included consultations with ISAF partners in RC-South. Lt. General Lessard confirmed that a CF reconnaissance team was already on the ground in Afghanistan to plan the coordination of the return of materiel to Canada, as well as disposal, donation, and sale of equipment, and transportation. Lt. General Lessard added that in the final five months of 2011, Canada would focus on repatriating personnel and materiel to Canada.

GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY ON THE SAME PAGE

¶17. (U) Separately, National Defence Minister Peter MacKay on December 7 provided a formal response to a written question in the House of Commons from the Liberal Party Defence Critic on Canada's post-2011 plans in Afghanistan. Minister MacKay confirmed that "the Department of National Defence has not developed contingencies for the extension of the Canadian military mission in Afghanistan beyond 2011." He added that DND had not devoted any ministerial resources to planning for the extension, acquired major materials to facilitate any contingency for the extension, nor taken any specific measures to prepare human resources in the CF for an extension of the military mission, "as the Chief of the Defence Staff had issued direction to redeploy Canadian Forces from Afghanistan in accordance with the parliamentary motion on Afghanistan of March 13, 2008."

¶18. (SBU) Comment; CDS Natynczyk provided a candid and forthright briefing, whose clarity at times appeared to take opposition members of the Defence Committee by surprise. The CDS' strict adherence to the terms of the parliamentary motion left opposition members little opportunity to question the federal government's commitment to ending Canada's military role in Afghanistan in 2011. General Natynczyk and his team left no room for ambiguity. As opposition members of the Committee greeted him informally after the briefing, the CDS asked each in turn "Was I clear? Was that clear enough for you?" The briefing did not include discussion of a civilian or development role. Surprisingly, the briefing -- and MacKay's December 7 statement in the House -- drew scant media coverage, as media focus continued to turn on alleged torture

Afghan detainees transferred by the CF to Afghan authorities (a subject on which Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon and Defence Minister MacKay will testify at the House of Commons' Special Committee on Afghanistan on December 9).

JACOBSON